

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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TOWARD BILINGUALISM IN SINGAPORE

ANNCR:

LIKE MANY OTHER COUNTRIES SINGAPORE CONTENDS WITH A PROBLEM OF DIVERGENT LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY ITS CITIZENS. NOW THE GOVERNMENT IS LAUNCHING A MAJOR CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THE LANGUAGES OF SINGAPORE TO TWO -- ENGLISH AND MANDARIN. HERE'S A BACKGROUND REPORT FROM WAYNE COREY IN OUR SOUTHEAST ASIAN BUREAU:

VOICE:

SINGAPORE'S MAJORITY CHINESE POPULATION SPEAKS NUMEROUS DIALECTS. THE COUNTRY'S MALAY AND INDIAN MINORITIES SPEAK MALAY, HINDI, AND TAMIL. THIS PROVIDES FOR A RICH ASSORTMENT OF COLORFUL LANGUAGES HEARD BY THE TOURIST WHO VISIT THIS MODERN CITY-STATE IN CONSTANTLY INCREASING NUMBERS.

BUT IT POSES OBVIOUS PROBLEMS FOR THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH MUST PROVIDE A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL OUTLETS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR THOSE WHO SPEAK THE LEAST COMMON LANGUAGES. IN HIS NEVER-ENDING DRIVE TO DEVELOP SINGAPORE, PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN-YEW HAS DECIDED ITS TIME TO TRY TO MAKE THE COUNTRY BILINGUAL, WITH TWO LANGUAGES TO BE ENGLISH AND MANDARIN.

ENGLISH IS ALREADY WIDELY USED FOR BUSINESS AS WELL AS IN GOVERNMENT. IN FACT MISTER LEE HIMSELF SPEAKS ENGLISH FAR BETTER THAN MANDARIN. HE SAID SINGAPORIANS SHOULD KNOW THEIR ROOTS, AND IF FEWER PEOPLE LEARNED MANDARIN, THE VALUES AND HERITAGE OF CHINESE CULTURE, WHICH ARE A VITAL PART OF SINGAPORE, MAY BE LOST.

PRIME MINISTER LEE SAID THAT TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW HE WOULD EXPECT SEVENTY OR EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE OF SINGAPORE TO SPEAK ENGLISH, AND THAT ALL CHINESE CITIZENS WOULD SPEAK MANDARIN. ENGLISH WOULD BE USED WHEN CHINESE, MALAYS AND INDIANS SPEAK TO

EACH OTHER. THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT IS CLEARLY AWARE OF THE ENORMITY OF THE TASK IT FACES TRYING TO GRADUALLY TURN THE COUNTRY INTO A BILINGUAL SOCIETY. SO IT WILL MOVE SLOWLY, AND AS MISTER LEE SAID, CORRECTIVE MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN IF NECESSARY IN ORDER TO INSURE THAT THE CAMPAIGN IS CONDUCTED AT THE PROPER PACE. BUT IT LOOKS NOW AS IF THERE CAN BE NO TURNING BACK. AND WAYS ARE NOW BEING DISCUSSED TO PROPERLY ENCOURAGE THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AND MANDARIN. ONE POSSIBILITY ALREADY RAISED IS THAT CHINESE JOB APPLICANTS WHO SPEAK THESE TWO LANGUAGES MAY RECEIVE PRIORITY CONSIDERATION IF ALL OTHER FACTORS ARE EQUAL.

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WJL/RTD